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Special Committee on Decolonization
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DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE HEARS EAST TIMORESE PETITIONERS

Amnesty International Proposes Human Rights Protection for Women and Children

The High Commissioner for Human Rights should develop a programme in East Timor tailored to the protection of the human rights of women and children, the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was told as it continued its hearing of petitioners this morning.

Eva Toth, representative of Amnesty International, said that the programme should have a time-frame for implementation and include a United Nations system-wide approach to be implemented in coordination with the world body's various agencies and with international financial institutions. The new Indonesian Government must ensure that local human rights monitors could carry out their work without fear or harassment and allow regular access to international human rights organizations.

Carlos Alga, representative of REDE de Solidariedad Internacional, said that the fascist Indonesian regime occupying East Timor was based on genocide and had survived by a system of spies, and with the military and political support of Western Powers who regarded Indonesia as a regional bulwark against communism. Those Western Powers recognized the annexation of East Timor -Australia formally, and the United States de facto. Recent events in Indonesia and the weakening of the regime had revived the struggle of the East Timorese and reopened the possibility of their achieving self-determination.

Since the integration with Indonesia, the people of East Timor recognized that sustainable development was the only means of promoting the people's fundamental rights, the representative of Forum Permuda Permudi Indonesia said. Those rights -- food, housing, education, and health care -- were denied during the 450 years of colonial rule, a period of plunder that had left East Timor without infrastructure.

Agostinho dos Santos Goncalves, Chairman, National Committee of the Indonesia Youth of East Timor, said it could not be denied that progress achieved since the end of Portuguese rule reflected the Indonesian Government's determination to develop the Territory's people who were left

(page 1a follows)

behind in all aspects of life due to 450 years of colonial rule. The improved level of education had encouraged East Timorese youth to become more selfreliant and had promoted a sense of community, nationhood and statehood.

Antonio Barbosa de Melo, Member of Parliament, Social Democratic Party of Portugal, said East Timor was still suffering from the horrors of violence -- imprisonments, arbitrary arrests, brutality, torture, extrajudiciary executions, disappearances, and the violation of women were just some aspects of everyday life. Timorese were increasingly requesting political asylum in foreign embassies. However, a change of attitude was noticeable in the Indonesian political class, with opposition leaders recognizing the possibility for a self-determination referendum in the Territory.

The Committee also heard petitions from a lawyer from Dili, East Timor; the representative of the Committee of Peace and Development in East Timor; the Chairman of the local Parliament's Economic Commission; Parliamentarians for East Timor; the Indonesian American, Inc.; and Members of the Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party of Portugal and the Socialist Party of Portugal.

The Committee will continue its hearing of petitions this afternoon at 3 o'clock.

(page 2 follows)

Committee Work Programme

The Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples met this morning to continue its hearing of petitioners on the question of East Timor. Before the Committee were two Secretariat working papers on East Timor (documents A/AC.109/2111 and Add.1).

BRUNO RODRIGUEZ-PARILLA (Cuba), Acting Chairman, said that the delegation of Colombia had requested to join the proceedings. He then invited the first petitioner to make his statement.

Petitions

CARLOS ALGA, of the REDE de Solidariedad Internacional, said that the "fascist Indonesian regime" that had invaded and occupied East Timor had been based on genocide and survived by a system of spies, and with the military and political support of Western Powers who regarded Indonesia as a regional bulwark against communism. Those Western Powers recognized the annexation of East Timor -- Australia formally, and the United States de facto.

He said recent events in Indonesia and the weakening of the regime that had led to a change in the Government had revived the struggle of the East Timorese and reopened the possibility of their achieving self- determination. The new position of President Habibie's Government arose from the need to protect the bureaucracy, the military, and the

interests of multinational corporations and the national bourgeoisie.

CARLOS DE FATIMA said that, as a lawyer practising in Dili, he had been able to follow closely the daily life of East Timorese who had considered themselves part of the Indonesian nation since November 1975. Years of debate in the Special Committee had done nothing but sow discord and confusion among the East Timorese people. A handful of parties had deliberately abused that forum to launch their propaganda which threatened the Committee's very credibility among the people in East Timor.

More than 50,000 East Timorese recently held a peaceful demonstration in Dili to reaffirm their wish that the Territory remain part of Indonesia, he said. That demonstration was in response to the action by a small number of vocal and radical East Timorese who always sought to impose their views on the majority, including on the question of a referendum. That small group, without considering the interest of the majority, had been trying to create a climate of confusion because East Timor was still on the United Nations list of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

On the National Convention of the East Timorese in the Diaspora, held in Lisbon last April, he said the event's organizers, including Portugal, wished to give the impression that they represented the views of the East Timorese. They represented no one but themselves, and their only claim to fame was their rhetoric. But rhetoric did not heal the sick and offered no comfort to the unemployed.

He said the East Timorese not only welcomed the reform process now taking place in Indonesia, but were also struggling hand in hand with other Indonesians to cope with the economic crisis facing that country. The Committee should recommend that the General Assembly remove East Timor from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Being the twenty-seventh province of Indonesia, the East Timorese people already had their own government and enjoyed the same rights and responsibilities as other Indonesians.

ABILIO SERENO, of the Committee of Peace and Development in East Timor, said fresh perspectives and hopes had arisen from the new situation in Jakarta. A new concerted effort was needed to achieve peace in East Timor. Recent meetings by various Timorese factions had considered the merits of both the proposed referendum and the special status for the Territory advocated by the Indonesian Government. Although Indonesia continued to claim East Timor, it remained open to negotiation. The current situation in the island was complex, and the society was not yet ready to deal with the anticipated postreferendum environment. The recent demonstration during the European Union's Troika visit had shown the current concern over the referendum. It was suicidal to consider such an approach now for the future of East Timor.

He said it was imperative that the current situation of insufficient infrastructures and scarce economic resources was addressed. There also needed to be a commitment in the search for a solution that accommodated the many diverse positions and autonomies in the Territory. That solution had to recognize, especially in schools, all the religious and cultural heritages that existed in EasT Timor. Such an approach was the only way to avoid the situation of winners and losers. He urged that agreements in the tripartite dialogue be reached as soon as possible.

GIL ALVES, Member of Local Parliament and Chairman of its Economic Commission, said an indisputable fact was that East Timor had exercised its right to self-determination through integration with Indonesia. Integration had once again

united the people of East Timor following centuries of Portugal's deliberate policy of divide and rule. The Territory had entered an important stage in its history with a comprehensive reform process that had taken it to a more democratic climate, one marked by greater transparency and accountability, as well as full participation in all sectors of life, including the upholding of human rights and the rule of law.

As an integral part of Indonesia, he said the vibrant democratic process was also being felt in East Timor. He was confident that the new democratic climate would open greater opportunity for the people of East Timor to strengthen their unity and further improve their living conditions through the development of an economy that was competitive, just and equitable. He appealed to all East Timorese to step into a democratic dialogue, supporting autonomy for the Territory within Indonesia.

FERNANDO NEVES (Portugal) said that like some petitioners yesterday, the previous speaker was comparing Portuguese and Indonesian colonialism. Even if Portugal had done nothing for East Timor in 450 years, as alleged by the petitioner, at least it had not killed a quarter of the Territory's population as Indonesia had done.

R.M. MARTY NATALEGAWA (Indonesia) said his delegation did not wish to comment on the petitioner's remarks and had already made clear that it did consider the East Timor issue to be relevant to the Special Committee's work. At the same time, the delegation could not but refer to remarks made yesterday by the delegation of Portugal in reference to unfounded allegations of genocide in East Timor. The Indonesian delegation would reply in due time.

AGOSTINHO DOS SANTOS GONCALVES, Chairman of National Committee of the Indonesia Youth of East Timor, said the perpetuation of colonial rule and occupation by Portugal had hardened the East Timorese character. The Territory's youth were essentially a humble, peace-loving and law-abiding people, but, at the same time, they could not accept those who violated their fundamental rights and freedoms. It could not be denied that the progress achieved since the end of
Portuguese rule reflected the determination and goodwill of the Indonesian Government in developing the Territory and its people who were left behind in all aspects of life as a result of 450 years of colonial rule.

Highlighting the progress which had been achieved in the development of youth in East Timor, he said that while the level of education was lower than other Indonesian provinces, it was still strikingly better than it had been before integration. The improvement in education had encouraged East Timorese youth to become more self-reliant in their thinking, as well as in the political and economic fields. That, in turn, had promoted a sense of community, nationhood and statehood. Timorese youth must be able to anticipate the challenges and opportunities of the era of globalization and reform. The reform process would enable youth to have greater participation in determining the future of the country, as well as the province. That would further reaffirm that the Territory was no longer non-self-governing.

RAMIDAN ALLAN PURBA, of Forum Permuda Permudi Indonesia, said that since the integration with Indonesia, the people of East Timor, as elsewhere, recognized that sustainable development was the only means to promote the fundamental rights of people. Those rights -- food, housing, education, and health care -- were deprived during the years of colonial rule. Following the irresponsible abandonment of the Territory by the colonial Power, the East Timorese people faced the terrible plight of civil war. The

450-year plunder of East Timor had left it with no infrastructure. In the field of health, there were only two hospitals and 14 clinics. Today, there were 11 hospitals and 332 village health centres. Likewise, in the educational sector, there were only two junior high schools and one senior high school. Today, every East Timorese child had the fundamental right to education and to attend school. In the "province of East Timor", 715 elementary schools, 114 junior schools, 58 senior high schools and four centres of higher education now existed. Illiteracy in the province at the end of colonial rule was 90 per cent -- it was now 14 per cent.

He said that though East Timor, along with the rest of Indonesia, was facing economic constraints, what was important to emphasize was that East Timor, as part of that country, would benefit from the ongoing reform. Indonesians had achieved great success in development efforts during the past three decades and would succeed in future endeavours as well. Tenacity, courage and determination were in abundance in Indonesia, including East Timor, and the people would move forward decisively into the next millenium.

JOHN MILLER, of Parliamentarians for East Timor, said that the people of East Timor had never been allowed to exercise their right to selfdetermination. Since the adoption in 1960 of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the Special Committee had successfully promoted the independence of 60 countries comprising 80 million people. Those nations were today Member States of the United Nations.

He said that on 24 June 1998, the Australian Senate called on the Indonesian Government to, among other things, release Xanana Gusmao. The Committee should make the most of the opportunity created by the resignation of President Suharto to make progress on the question of East Timor. Last year, parliamentarians for East Timor urged the Committee to call for the withdrawal of Indonesian troops from East Timor.

The association looked forward in anticipation of the work the Committee would carry out to facilitate the self-determination of the remaining NonSelf-Governing Territories, he said.

SAMSU MAFUDI, of Indonesian American, Inc., appealed to his fellow Timorese -- East and West -- to wake up and stay together. The Indonesians were in the midst of reforming the country, and Timorese should join the fight to bring the Indonesian reformation, with its new wind of justice and freedom, to a successful conclusion. If that failed, then the top-down democracy, that
was no democracy, would return. The end of the cold war had torn down the Berlin Wall, why should the wall between East and West Timor not also be removed?

Globalization had made the reformation in Indonesia possible, he said. Now it was up to the people to preserve freedom from the ravages of Government. He appealed to the East Timorese to echo the late President Kennedy, and say "Ich bin ien Timoreser". Indonesia was willing to provide the people of East Timor equal consideration, in the form of principality or an autonomous region of East Timor.

EVA TOTH, of Amnesty International, said the new Government in Jakarta must ensure that local human rights monitors were able to carry out their work without fear or harassment and must allow regular access to international human rights organizations,

including Amnesty International. It must also demonstrate that it was now genuine in its promises to cooperate with the United Nations by implementing recommendations made following visits by United Nations experts and by the High Commissioner for Human Rights to East Timor. The Government must also act on the commitments contained in the negotiated statements by the Chair of the Human Rights Commission.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights should develop a human rights programme, to be agreed upon by all the parties in East Timor, with a timeframe for implementation. The programme should include a United Nations system-wide approach to be implemented in coordination with the various United Nations agencies and the international financial institutions. The programme should identify key steps to be taken to create an environment for human rights promotion and protection. That could include the memorandum of understanding currently under discussion between the Indonesian Government and the United Nations Centre for Human Rights.

A human rights programme for East Timor should specifically address the protection of the human rights of women and children and, in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other relevant United Nations agencies and funds, ensure the development of a comprehensive framework of protection for all. Amnesty International believed that talks on the future of East Timor could succeed only within such a human rights framework.

NUNO KRUS ABECASIS, Social Democratic Party Member of the Portuguese Parliament, said that recent events in Indonesia resulting in the resignation of President Suharto, and in profound political, economic and social crises, had brought to light the fragility of the Indonesian institutions and economy, which had survived by an imposed silence, corruption and disrespect for the most rudimentary human rights.

Among the voices that had joined in the cry for justice for East Timor were those of South African President Nelson Mandela, who knew by experience the bitterness of an imprisoned homeland, he said. Other voices included those of the United States Congress; the European Council, which had sent a troikas of observers to East timor; the European Parliament; the international mass media; numerous governments and parliaments throughout the world; the community of Portuguese-speaking countries, comprising more than 200 million people; Amnesty International; and many university members, students, religious leaders, union members and even Indonesian politicians.

In the name of that growing outcry, he called for the freedom of East Timor, the release of Xanana Gusmao and all other political prisoners, and for the holding of a referendum under the auspices of the United Nations, so that the people of East Timor could freely choose their own destiny.

ANTONIO BARBOSA DE MELO, Member of Parliament, Social Democratic Party, said the last decade had shown that the most repressive regimes were usually the most fragile. History had also shown that there were forces more powerful than the strongest armies. Civil discontent with the Indonesian Government,
youth activism and the current economic situation were just some of the factors that had brought down the dictator Suharto and seriously challenged a regime that was based on the denial of basic human rights and political freedom. President Habibie was now faced with taking either clear decisions or closing his eyes to the dynamism of history. East Timor was still suffering from the horrors of

violence and military occupation -- imprisonments, arbitrary arrests, brutality, torture, extrajudiciary executions, disappearances, and the violation of women were just some of the everyday aspects of life experienced there. More and more, Timorese were requesting political asylum in embassies in Jakarta.

He said Indonesia continued to obfuscate the right to self-determination by the Timorese people as stipulated by the United Nations. Exploitation was rife in the territorial seas of the island. Indonesia seemed to have forgotten that peace could not return to East Timor until self- determination was exercised by the Timorese. Until political prisoners were freed, the situation in the Territory could not be normalized. However, a change of attitude was noticeable in the Indonesian political class. Opposition leaders there had recognized the possibility of holding a self-determination referendum in East Timor. They had also begun to recognize the cultural, religious and political identity of the East Timorese. The question to be asked was whether Indonesia could finally return to a decolonizing position and erase a long history that implied the opposite.

CARLOS MANUEL LUIS, Socialist Party Member of the Portuguese Parliament, outlined the series of events beginning on 7 December 1975, when the Government of Portugal sought an urgent meeting of the Security Council to act on the Indonesian aggression launched against the Territory of East Timor, of which Portugal was the administering Power.

Recalling the subsequent General Assembly and Security Council actions, as well as Indonesian defiance of those United Nations resolutions in 1975 and 1976, he reminded the Committee that many international bodies had declared their support for the self-determination and independence of East Timor.

He said that following the resignation of President Suharto, new prospects were opening up for a democratic Indonesia and for the people of East Timor to be consulted through a referendum on their future.

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